

Intelligence Data Called a Goal of Ship Seizure

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 25—North Korea's seizure of the Pueblo may have given Communist counterintelligence experts an opportunity to acquire significant data on Western intelligence techniques.

Administration officials were hesitant to say that this was the prime motive behind the North Korean action, but there was wide belief that it played a subsidiary role alongside other factors.

The key question — did the Communists in fact gain valuable data from the intelligence gathering ship and her crew—remains unanswered. Officials in a position to know would not discuss the subject, and others merely followed a line of logical reasoning, without claiming specific evidence.

Though the Soviet Union is known to have a fleet of 40 vessels with advanced intelligence-gathering equipment of

But Extent of Information Communists Can Acquire Is the Key Question

its own, United States officials said, it would clearly be useful to Moscow to discover the state of American technology in this sensitive area. It could also have an opportunity to "interview" the specialized crewmen on board.

According to signals received from the ship, an apparently insufficient time elapsed before the capture of the Pueblo for all the secret equipment and files to be destroyed. There would be a standard operating procedure to be carried out in the event of danger, it was said, and for this type of ship it would probably take about 30 minutes to complete the job.

Officials say there are indications that much of the Pueblo's monitoring equipment was

destroyed, but probably not the files, which contained top-secret documents and plans.

From a counterintelligence point of view, therefore, there would be great potential value in holding the ship and the crewmen—at least for two or three weeks of examination and interrogation.

But State Department and Defense Department officials were agreed that the intelligence value would not in itself justify North Korea's bold and dangerous action.

These analysts listed other factors that have led North Korea to seize an opportunity:

¶North Korea, like any Communist nation, is interested in embarrassing the United States by any means—the more spectacular the better. The propaganda gain is not dismissed lightly here.

¶Exposure of a naval vessel would serve effectively to kindle any suspicions in the minds of other Asian leaders, and those in the Middle East as well, where United States naval maneuvers occur regularly near coastlines of both friendly and unfriendly nations.

¶For the North Koreans, the Pueblo incident will probably produce a valuable increase in stature within the Communist movement. Pyongyang has been calling loudly for "diversionary" measures to distract United States energies from the war in Vietnam—now it has accomplished what one official here called a "sheer beaut."

It has been particularly annoying to the North Koreans, American analysts said, that South Korea has been able to send 47,000 troops to Vietnam to fight alongside the Americans and the South Vietnamese.

The Pueblo incident, therefore has produced new tension between North and South Korea. The pro-Eastern regime in Seoul is being blamed as much as the United States for alleged espionage ventures against the North.

Many of these factors apply as much to the Soviet Union as to the North Koreans.